

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE

Public Health Service

Bethesda 14, Md.

National Institutes of Health

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Dr. Van R. Potter
McArdle Memorial Laboratory
The University of Wisconsin
Medical School
Madison 6, Wisconsin

Dear Dr. Potter:

Dr. Shannon has asked me to reply to your letter of November 21. The question that you raised has stimulated a great deal of discussion around NIH, and this accounts for the excessive delay in responding to your letter.

There are not now in the United States an adequate number of points at which the relationships between science and society can be productively discussed.

As you know, a large number of groups advisory to the Federal Government on matters of science deal in a partial way with the economic, sociological and cultural aspects of various areas of science, but this is entirely incidental.

I have a personal conviction that the relationship between science and society--of which one aspect is governmental activity in science and the relationships between universities and the Federal Government--is of such general significance as to be a worthy area for exploration in an academic atmosphere. The philosophical problems involved in the reciprocal relationships between science and society are, in my opinion, a productive starting point for an academic area of interest. As a matter of fact, I think that several universities should seriously consider the establishment of a chair and the development of cooperative teaching relationships required to deal with this question of the mutual dependence and in a sense the conflict between science and the pressures of society. I have talked with people from Harvard and also the Carnegie Corporation about the possibility of establishing such an area of study. If this idea appeals to you you might wish to explore it at Wisconsin. I am sure that Dr. Elvehjem would be prepared to consider such an undertaking seriously. As soon as I have a little time I intend to write down a prospectus for such an undertaking, encompassing a basic set of books, and an outline of a series of seminars, and a list of possible doctoral dissertations.

I know that I have not answered your question satisfactorily, but perhaps in asking other questions we may proceed towards some productive end.

Sincerely yours,

Charles V. Kidd, Chief
Office of Research Planning